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Britain begs drivers: Don't fill old water bottles with fuel

London.—Britain's transport minister pleaded with motorists yesterday to refrain from filling up old water bottles with fuel at gas stations after panic buying left pumps dry across major cities and prompted the government to put the army on standby.

British drivers hunted for hours or sat snarled in queues to fill their tanks; dozens of forecourts were closed with signs saying they had no petrol or diesel, Reuters report-

ers said. A post-Brexit shortage of truck drivers, exacerbated by a halt to truck-driving-licence testing during COVID lockdowns and people leaving the haulage industry, has sown chaos through supply chains, raising the spectre of shortages and price rises in the run up to Christmas.

Britain put a limited number of military tanker drivers on a state of readiness to be deployed to deliver fuel if

necessary. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said there were some hints the situation was easing as reserves at some gas stations had been replenished.

"We're starting to see very tentative signs of stabilisation which won't yet be reflected in the queues," he told reporters.

"The sooner we all return to our normal buying habits, the quicker this gets resolved," he said.

MINIMUM WAGE JOY

Madrid.—The 1.6% minimum wage increase agreed earlier this month by the Spanish government will be retroactive from Sept. 1, the office of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said yesterday.

The government had reached an agreement with labour unions to raise minimum wage to the equivalent of 1,125.8 euros a month, paid in 14 installments.

Spain's business association, the CEOE, did not sign the agreement.



PM Sanchez.



Drowning girl statue causes a big stir in Bilbao

Bilbao.—Staring impassively out from the murky waters of Bilbao's River Nervion, the eerily lifelike face of a young girl drowning in the tide has been unsettling people in the Spanish city since she appeared unannounced last week.

Mexican hyperrealist artist Ruben Orozco created the enigmatic figure, entitled 'Bihar' (Tomorrow in Basque) for a campaign by the BBK Foundation - the charitable arm of Spanish lender

Kutxabank - to encourage debate around sustainability. The goal is for people to be aware that "their actions can sink us or keep us afloat", the artist told Spanish news website Nius.

As the tides rise and fall, the 120 kg (264 lb) fibreglass figure is submerged and uncovered each day, which BBK said was a reflection on what could happen "if we continue to bet on unsustainable models" such as those that contribute to climate change.



DISASTER ZONE DECLARED

Madrid.— Spain's government classified the island of La Palma, which has been struck by a volcanic eruption, as a disaster zone yesterday, a move that will trigger

emergency subsidies and other support measures. The government announced a first package of 10.5 million euros (\$12.30 million), which includes around 5 mil-

lion euros to buy houses, with the rest to acquire furniture and essential household goods, government spokesperson Isabel Rodriguez told reporters yesterday.